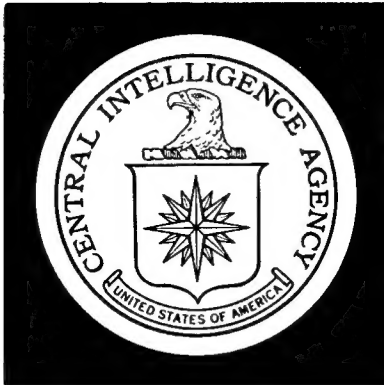


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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

The Current State of Sino-Soviet Relations

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24 April 1970

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
24 April 1970

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Current State of Sino-Soviet Relations

1. The Sino-Soviet talks in Peking are entering their seventh month. During this period no progress has been made toward a firm agreement on the disputed Sino-Soviet border, not to speak of resolving the more fundamental clashes of ideology or national interest. Early this month we received a few reports alleging that "some progress" had been made in the negotiations and raising the possibility that the Soviets had made token troop withdrawals from the frontier. Recent harsh propaganda blasts by both sides, however, together with a reported statement by chief Soviet negotiator Kuznetsov flatly denying reports of troop withdrawals, indicate that the stalemate persists. Meanwhile, there has been maneuvering over a possible exchange of ambassadors, but no appointments have yet been publicly announced.

2. The recent upsurge in Sino-Soviet polemics--particularly Peking's harsh and wide-ranging 18,000 word criticism of Brezhnev's "social militarism" issued to mark the 22 April Lenin centennial--points to a continuing deadlock over border problems. In addition, it underscores the suspicion and hostility that make substantial progress in the talks exceedingly difficult. The Peking tract culminated a month-long escalation in China's polemics against Moscow.

Note: This is the first of a series of biweekly special reports on Sino-Soviet relations. Subsequent reports will concentrate more upon current developments during the reporting period and less on background information. This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence, and coordinated with the Office of Strategic Research.

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For the first time since the talks began, Peking revived public charges of Soviet nuclear blackmail against China and "encroachment" on Chinese territory. For their part, the Soviets have not been sitting on the sidelines. Party chief Brezhnev has within the past ten days made two public statements placing full blame on China for the continuing dispute and berating Peking for stirring up a "war psychosis" that diminishes prospects for success in the talks.

3. At present, the talks are apparently in recess while Deputy Foreign Minister Kuznetsov is back in Moscow, ostensibly for the Lenin centennial ceremonies. Although a Soviet official has said that Kuznetsov will be returning to Peking "shortly," he may tarry in Moscow to review the course of the talks and discuss future policy with Soviet leaders.

The State of the Negotiations

4. The issue of Soviet military pressure against China has from the start been one of the fundamental obstacles to progress in the talks. The Chinese, in order to get out from under the Soviet gun, have insisted that no progress is possible in the negotiations until the Soviets reduce their military forces along the frontier. Peking proposes a mutual withdrawal of major military units from the border--a move that would mainly affect the Soviets. It has also demanded that the Soviets withdraw all armed personnel--including border guards--from the disputed areas of the frontier. The Soviets have heretofore adamantly resisted any move that would either reduce their military advantage or appear to acknowledge Chinese territorial claims. Moscow, however, has been sensitive to Peking's charge that it is forcing negotiations under military pressure, and has issued awkward, self-righteous statements denying this.

[REDACTED]

5. As a result of the sweeping conditions proposed by Peking, the talks have not got down to serious discussion on demarcation of the frontier. From the beginning the Soviets have sought to get Peking to focus on this question, and Brezhnev, in his 14 April remarks, reiterated that an agreement on the frontier remains "essential." The Chinese, however, see no immediate need to compromise their position. The continuing discussions have provided Peking with a good reading of Soviet intentions and have accordingly reduced fears over the possibility of precipitous Soviet military action. Although the Soviets have indicated their willingness to make "reciprocal concessions" on the territorial question that would even include relinquishing their claim to the contested island of Damansky/Chenpao, there is no indication that the Chinese are ready to negotiate these questions seriously.

Reported Troop Withdrawals

6. We have serious doubts that reports received earlier this month of Soviet troop withdrawals from the frontier reflect actual Soviet concessions on this vital issue.

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[REDACTED] The US press has focused on a different and more sensational version of the troop withdrawal reports. In early April a UPI dispatch allegedly originating with the Soviet Embassy in London claimed that the Soviets had unilaterally pulled back their forces 40-50 kilometers, and had reason to think the Chinese would reciprocate.

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8. Recent developments tend further to discredit the alleged troop withdrawals. Kuznetsov himself has reportedly told Western diplomats in Peking that such reports are without foundation and that the Soviets would not consider acting unilaterally. In addition, Peking's renewed charges this week of Soviet "encroachment" along the border strongly suggest that token moves by Moscow will not satisfy Peking.

Frontier Situation

9. The border itself has apparently remained relatively quiet for the past six months. Occasional rumors of incidents and references by both sides to "provocations" suggest that there may have been some pushing and shoving between frontier guards, but no major clashes such as occurred last year. Both sides have apparently abided by the "gentleman's agreement" made between Kosygin and Chou En-lai last September to avoid border incidents or provocations during the negotiations. The Soviets, for example, have privately said that their frontier guards have been given "strict instructions" to maintain correct relations with their counterparts,

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10. [redacted] the Chinese maintained defensive positions during the winter months on Damansky/Chenpao. The Chinese apparently reoccupied the island after last spring's fighting in order to reassert their claim to this and other disputed islands in the Ussuri and Amur rivers. The Soviets have not contested the Chinese presence, although they have sent Peking a formal note protesting frontier violations. They probably

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accept it as part of the status quo that Chou En-lai and Kosygin agreed to observe and are concerned that a forcible move would risk rupturing the negotiations. In addition, the Soviets are not willing at this stage to shed blood over an island that they consider of little real value and that is in any case probably isolated by spring flood waters.

State Relations

11. Soviet officials early this month began privately spreading the word of the appointment of a new ambassador to Peking, Vladimir Stepanov. Resumption of ambassadorial ties--broken in 1966--has been one goal of the Soviet effort to "normalize" relations with Peking. Premier Kosygin broached the subject during his September 1969 meeting with Chou En-lai, and late last year a Soviet official claimed there was an "agreement in principle" with Peking on the subject. The Soviets are now saying that Peking has agreed to name its envoy to Moscow "at a later date," but Chinese officials have made neither public nor private statements to this effect.

12. Soviet diplomats in Peking have acknowledged that one purpose of Stepanov's appointment may be to facilitate the departure of chief negotiator Kuznetsov and the continuation of the talks at the ambassadorial level. Stepanov, who recently was eased out of his post as head of the central committee propaganda department, does not have experience in either diplomatic or Chinese affairs. The designation of a party official, however, nominally restores Moscow's diplomatic representation to the level characteristic of that in other socialist countries. In addition, Stepanov's experience in the propaganda and ideological fields well suits him to handle polemics with China.

13. The Chinese thus far have dragged their feet on accepting Stepanov's appointment, which they almost certainly see as presaging a Soviet effort to slap at China by recalling Kuznetsov and downgrading

[redacted]

the negotiations. Peking probably also interprets Stepakov's poor diplomatic qualifications as a calculated insult to China. Peking appeared to be indirectly objecting to Stepakov last week when it vigorously--and accurately--criticized errors in an ideological tract that the former propaganda chief probably had a hand in publishing. Despite these objections, however, the Chinese probably will feel constrained eventually to accept Stepakov as a show of reasonableness in the dispute and to keep the crucial border negotiations in session. Indeed, [redacted]

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[redacted] claims they have already done so and in turn named their own ambassador, but we are reluctant to accept [redacted] without confirmation.

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14. Moscow has been pressing for "normalization" of state ties in other areas, such as commercial relations, but there has been no sign of appreciable movement. Low level negotiations on a trade pact for 1970 have apparently got nowhere.

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Military Developments

15. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Soviet military buildup has continued unabated. [redacted]

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[REDACTED]

16. Present evidence indicates that the Soviet buildup has proceeded at the steady and deliberate pace begun in 1965. We continue to believe that the Soviet goal is to establish a force capable of repelling any Chinese military initiative or of conducting limited military operations across the Chinese border. The buildup thus far does not appear designed to prepare for large-scale ground operations against China.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] There is no evidence that the rate of buildup has been changed because of the series of border clashes last year or as a result of the Peking talks. Given the time leads involved, we judge that the decisions to deploy the new units identified on the border last year probably were made prior to the clashes.

17. Soviet ground forces near the border and their combat support units probably now number between 240,000 and 265,000 men.

[REDACTED]

18. As in previous years, the continuation of the Soviet buildup has not led to a large scale Chinese response.

[REDACTED]

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We now estimate that the Chinese have about 595,000 men in the military regions adjacent to the Soviet Union, most of them garrisoned well back from the border.

Short Term Outlook

19. The short term prospects for the talks will continue to reflect the basic motives of both sides for entering the negotiations and the strategy they have employed in conducting them. The Chinese came to the bargaining table as a result of the military and political pressure, including hints of nuclear war, that the Soviets mounted last summer. The Chinese, increasingly fearful of Soviet intentions, wanted to damp down the situation on the border lest it either lead to or provide the pretext for a Soviet attack. This goal has now been temporarily met by agreements reached in the Kosygin-Chou meeting and by continuation of the Peking talks. As long as the negotiations drag on, China probably feels the threat of immediate Soviet military action has diminished. As a result, Peking has remained unwilling to swallow its pride and reach an accommodation over the frontier.

20. On the other hand, Soviet concern over the drift of events on the frontier was compounded by suspicions of Chinese intentions toward Soviet territory. Moscow wanted relief from the uncertainty that border tensions had caused. The Soviets also feared that third parties such as the US were taking advantage of their preoccupation or would calculate that the USSR's problems with China would force it to make concessions to other rivals. Thus the Soviets also have a vested interest in the continuation of the talks as a means of keeping the frontier calm and creating an appearance of some stability in relations with China.

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21. Nevertheless, the Soviets in recent months have begun to show publicly signs of impatience and frustration over the lack of progress. This has been reflected in increasingly strident attacks on China in the Soviet press, such as one mid-March article by "Alexandrov"--an authoritative pseudonym last used on the eve of the Czech invasion--which implicitly warned the Chinese that they should be more forthcoming in the talks. Peking, instead of being cowed by these Soviet attacks, has recently responded in kind, suggesting that China will continue to resist Soviet demands that it get down to business on a frontier treaty. The Soviet move in naming an ambassador to China seems to signal a Soviet realization that the negotiations are not getting anywhere and that it is time to put their valued negotiator Kuznetsov to better use.

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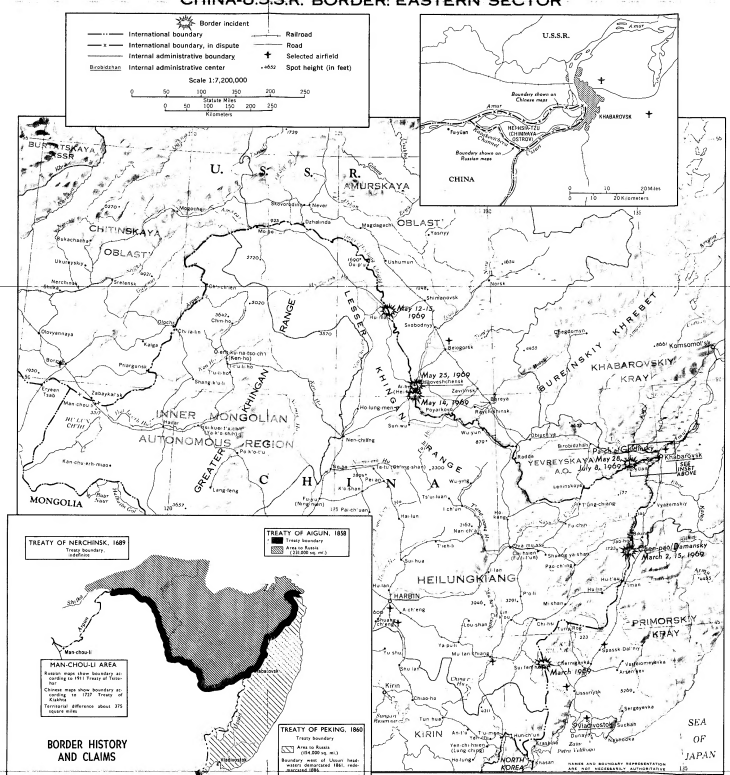
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There is a good possibility that the Soviets will propose in the next few weeks a change in the level or perhaps the location of the discussions but, like the Chinese, they see value in the talks and want them to continue.

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